

# Colorado



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## **Squawk Talk: An Exercise in Effective Communications During a Flu Pandemic**

In October and December 2006, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, along with several state and local emergency response partners, lead and conducted an exercise series, "Squawk Talk," focusing on one of the most important capacities an agency needs: to achieve and maintain effective communications.



This focus was determined by the exercise series conducted in 2005, "Fowl Play," in which 70% of the comments received indicated that communications, both public information and tactical, could be improved. On October 4, 2006, and December 12, 2006, the department held advanced tabletop and functional exercises using the same avian influenza outbreak scenario for both exercises. The tabletop exercise focused on three critical emergency preparedness aspects including: implementing protocols for initiating a joint information system; drafting and gaining approval

for message to be distributed to emergency response agencies, partners, and the public within 60 minutes; and implementing an interagency communication protocol between participating agencies, ensuring timely and accurate exchange of information.

### **Advanced Tabletop Exercise, October 4, 2006**

During the tabletop exercise, all players were in one room and received "injects," or pre-scripted messages that are provided to participants during the course of an exercise that may effect the exercise play. Injects prompted the players to focus on sharing the information and ensure that other players in the room received the information as well. In addition to sharing information, certain injects prompted players to initiate a Joint Information System in order to collaboratively develop press releases and hold taped simulated joint news conferences. After the joint news conferences were conducted, the video was played back in the main exercise room for all participants to see. The intention was to: 1) give spokes-persons time in front of a camera with other agencies; and 2) emphasize that response agencies need to share information about an event on an ongoing basis.



**Colorado Department  
of Public Health  
and Environment**

**Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment**  
4300 Cherry Creek Drive South, Denver, CO 80246-1530  
[www.cdphe.state.co.us](http://www.cdphe.state.co.us) 303.692.2700 800.886.7689

## Functional Exercise, December 12, 2006

The functional exercise was a continuation of the advanced tabletop exercise, to provide state and local public health agencies with the opportunity to jointly carry out response activities from their respective Emergency Operation Centers instead of simply conversing across a table. The exercise focused on four separate measurable objectives for CDPHE:

1. Implementation of protocols for initiating a joint information system
2. Interagency communication transfer
3. Establishment and maintenance of incident command
4. Usage of internal Department Operations Center job action sheets



More than 70 agencies from across the state participated in the exercises and another 20 agencies/organizations observed. Key participating groups included: public health, emergency management, agriculture, National Guard, mental health, medical, law enforcement, regulatory affairs, Tribal Nations and public utilities.

### Exercise Goals and Objectives

All agencies involved shared a responsibility in the Colorado Homeland Security Strategy Planning Document 2005, and the goals for the State of Colorado. The strategy represents a comprehensive approach to addressing response and recovery and this exercise supported Goals 2 and 8 of the Colorado Homeland Security vision: Goal #2 addresses comprehensive training for elected officials and emergency responders, and providing education regarding security strategy and awareness. Goal #8 refers to appropriate epidemiological response to a public health emergency and management through communication.



The 2006 “SquawkTalk” functional exercise also supports the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Public Health Emergency Preparedness 2005 Cooperative Agreement Goal #5: *Decrease time to identify causes, risk factors, and appropriate interventions for those affected by threats to the public’s health*; Performance Measure # 16: *Time to notify all primary staff (secondary or tertiary staff as needed) with public health agency ICS functional responsibilities that the public health agency’s emergency operations center (EOC) is being activated (Mean = 60 minutes)*; and Performance Measure #17: *Time for primary staff (secondary or tertiary staff as needed) with public health agency ICS functional responsibilities to report for duty at public health agency’s EOC. (Mean = 2 ½ hours from time that public health director or designated official receives notification that the public health agency’s EOC will be activated).*

The functional exercise specified four separate measurable objectives for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment:

1. Implement protocols for initiating a joint information system.
2. Implement an interagency communication protocol between participating departments, ensuring timely and accurate exchange of information.
3. Establish incident command at the Department Operations Center. In particular, the following will be tested:
  - a. All pertinent roles (Incident Commander, Operations, Logistics, and Planning) are filled and clearly identifiable.
  - b. All pre-identified pertinent supporting roles filled and clearly identifiable.
  - c. Incident Commander to remain in control of the Department Operations Center operations at all times.
  - d. Provide a Job Action Sheet for all pertinent Department Operations Center roles.
  - e. Establish regular incident management briefings.
  - f. Determine trigger for moving from Level III activation to Level II activation.
  - g. Perform a shift change of all Department Operations Center roles per established shift change procedures.

4. Exercise the CDPHE Department Operations Center Job Action Sheets for all pre-identified and pertinent roles and ensure that all jobs are filled and clearly identifiable.
  - a. Evaluate Job Action Sheets using the evaluation sheet provided for the purposes of correcting, updating and adjusting job responsibilities for all pertinent Department Operations Center roles.
  - b. Implement check-in/check-out procedures for all positions activated.
  - c. Security is implemented at the Department Operations Center for the safety of all staff and volunteers.

Several participating local public health agencies tested the same communication objectives listed above (#1 and #2). The Colorado Division of Emergency Management and some local public health agencies also chose additional objectives specific to their agencies.

### Exercise Training

Training specific to the functional exercise included two exercise orientation broadcasts for all participants, as well as two internal Department Operations Center trainings. Controllers and evaluators received position-specific trainings prior to the functional exercise.

### Participants

- **State:** Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Colorado Division of Emergency Management, Colorado Department of Public Safety, Colorado Department of Regulatory Affairs, Colorado Department of Personnel & Administration, Colorado Division of Wildlife, Colorado Department of Agriculture, Colorado Department of Transportation, Colorado State University, Colorado Department of Military and Veteran's Affairs, Colorado Department of Human Services, Governor's Office
- **Local:** Local public health agencies of the following all-hazards regions: Northwest, West, Northeast, North Central, Southeast, Southwest, South Central, South and San Luis Valley. Local public health agencies were given the option to invite other local partners.
- **Federal:** National Disaster Medical System, Federal Emergency Management Agency
- **Non-Governmental Organizations:** American Red Cross, Southern Mountain Ute Tribal Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribal Nation, Salvation Army



### Evaluation

Executive Order 3 was an integral component in three significant exercises during 2006, two of which were state-level and another regional. While the enactment of the Executive Order was simulated for the exercise, the exercise participants went through the steps required to activate the SNS with Executive Order 3. To date, the order has not been used in an official capacity.

### Resources

Joint Information System Activation Summary  
After-action report (pending)

### Additional Information

Nicole Sangouard, Exercise Senior Controller  
303-692-2971 or [nicole.sangouard@state.co.us](mailto:nicole.sangouard@state.co.us)

Barbara J. Beiser, Editor  
303-692-2710 or [barbara.beiser@state.co.us](mailto:barbara.beiser@state.co.us)



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and Environment